4: Villa Rojas E-4,5 (1938-1944) 1969 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

9. The Tzeltal

ALFONSO VILLA ROJAS

133 flows through the eastern part of the region, the latter through the western, both draining large basins.

161 According to the census of 1950, the pop-
162 ulation of the zone totals 76,617 individuals, distributed over 15,970 sq. km. Of these 49,053 persons are Indian, 27,564 are Ladino. This population is distributed according to Table 1.

[128] San Cristobal de las Casas is omitted from the table because its population is predominantly Ladino (19,758 individuals) and because the Indians who live there (3,296) are of the Tzotzil tongue. Socoltenango and Nicolas Ruiz are also omitted because they no longer have an Indian-speaking population.

161 The central region has the municipalities
631 of the highest density of population: Oxchuc with 129 inhabitants per sq. km., and Tene-
• [134] japa with 115. The northern part has an area seven times as large with only twice as much population; the municipality of Ocosingo has hardly one inhabitant per sq. km. in spite of the fact that its lands are the most fertile of the entire region. Although it

[P. 195-B]
[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 196-B]

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

Change in soil is probably the reason for change in vegetation. The tropical forest grows on black humus soil and the pine country is underlain by a red sandstone which weathers into a heavy red clay. The contact of this sandstone with the limestone country on which leaf trees grow lies about an hour's ride north of the village of Bachajon.

The pine country is very hilly, the trees are scattered over a carpet of vivid green grass cut by the strong red line of the soil of the trail like a scar (fig. 195).

It was like riding through a magnificent park, up and down the hills and across small streams. Our poor animals had a hard time on the slippery trail. La Farge's horse gave out, and he had to change his saddle to a spare animal.

The Bachajon Indian village came in sight, lying on a hill in the middle of the valley. It was well after noon when we reached the dilapidated, grass-roofed and mud-walled huts clustered around the huge ruin of an old Spanish stone church. The Indians use a new church which they have built of the same material as their houses.

The house of the Government agent lies in the middle of the village and here we were quartered in a room, the floor of which had just been covered with a carpet of fresh pine needles.

The Bachajon Indians are reputed to be unfriendly to all travellers, so we were not surprised when the Indian chief of the village told us that he could not furnish fodder for our animals or men to carry some of our cargo. To all our questions he answered "Mayuk," or in English, "Ain't got none." But when the chief, a little later, heard from our Encanto men that we had been friendly to them, and that furthermore, we were friends of the big father President in Mexico City, he changed his attitude.

The Government agent is sent to the Indian village by the civil authorities of the neighbouring Mexican town of Ocosingo. He is supposed to collect certain taxes, raise labourers for public works in the Mexican town, and help the Indians with their affairs. He is highly unpopular among the Indians, who counteract his orders through a remarkable system of passive resistance. They say "yes" to everything and do nothing. The only reason the Indians tolerate him is because he keeps a small store and sells liquor. The Indian is very fond of sugar-cane rum, and every Saturday and Sunday all the villagers generally get drunk. The agent complained bitterly that the Indians were not selling him any food supplies and was astonished when they sold us chickens and eggs.

Most of the Bachajon Indians live hidden away in the bush. Only the families of the chief and the village officials live around the old church ruins.

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

Revolutions have since destroyed the herds, and the town now has only a small local trade in sugar and rum.

All goods are transported on mule-back over bad trails. Main trails run to Yajalon, San Cristóbal las Casas, and Comitan. Minor trails connect with Tenosique in Tabasco, a ride of five or six days through uninhabited forests. Other small trails lead into the heart of the forests along the Usumacinta river, where there are a few mahogany camps, fourteen days distance on a good mule.

The Spanish Conquerors had quickly discovered the richness of the soil and taken possession of it. Therefore, we find but a few Indians around Ocosingo, save at the small town of Sivacá, entirely inhabited by Tzeltal-speaking Indians. From there we secured our labourers, who were summoned by the municipal president and worked for us at the regulation pay of 50 centavos per day. Ocosingo holds sway over the native towns of Sivacá, Tenango, Oschuc, San Martín, and Bachajon. The municipality commands the Indians for all kinds of work, and in many ways lives on what can be pressed from them. As a consequence, the good people of Ocosingo are anything but popular among the Indians, though it appears that the man then in charge, Señor Simon Leon, was quite friendly towards them, and therefore well liked.

Geologically, the Ocosingo Valley is a syncline, the valley bottom and the interior mountain ranges being of a coarse red sandstone, and the exterior ranges of limestone. The axis of the valley runs approximately N-80-W to S-80-E, and Ocosingo town is located at an altitude of 900 meters above sea level.

As we rode into the village, La Farge discovered a stone block, carved with hieroglyphs, set in the pavement of the sidewalk, an excellent reception for archaeologists.

Our first concern was to find quarters, which we located in a house on the corner of a street leading into the Plaza. Soon our equipment was unloaded, and while we unpacked, the Ladino guide we had acquired in Bachajon went to his house to order food for us.

The restaurant and meal were a surprise, though not pleasant. In a room with a rotten board floor, the plaster falling off the walls, and a huge box full of saints, we were served fried eggs and black beans by an old woman with a large goitre. Though nothing in the house appeared to be either particularly exclusive or clean, the Ladino family seemed to resent that we sat down at the table with our chief guide, the trusty old Indian, Lázaro, now called "Tata" by us.

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Bachajón

The country near the village has been farmed out long ago; now the fields lie at a distance in the jungle. After every concentration, the Indians drift away again like blown smoke. Today most of the houses are rotten, sagging, with gaping doors. The paths are grown up with weeds, huge, old moss-covered crosses lean at crazy angles by the main trails. Over all broods the frame of the sacked church, huge stone walls with rank vegetation around them, and a twisted, unhealthy oak-tree on one side, like a composition by Piranesi.

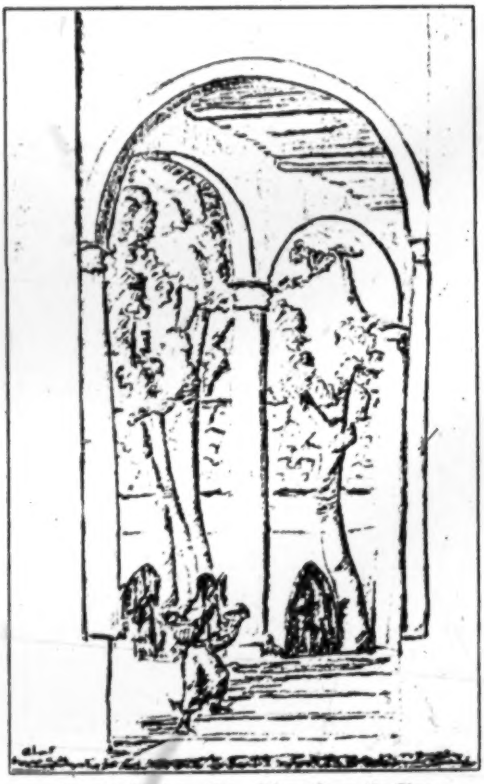

FIG. 277—Ocosingo, Chia. Colonnade on the Plaza.

Ocosingo Valley and its neighbours furnish a transition towards the real highlands. The valleys are fertile and green, ringed in with ranges of steep, rich hills. The soil in the lower parts is light; here palms and pines grow together, with a luxuriance of rich grass that makes an ideal grazing country. Through the valleys are large and small ranches of Ladinos and old Spanish families. The bigger ones, such as San Antonio, Quechil, and Achin in the Ocosingo Valley, San José Reforma and El Real beyond the San José Pass, and Tecojá in its own valley, each has a village of Indian labourers attached to them. The natives' houses are rather better that the average, and often tile-roofed (fig. 278). The Indians of each ranch function more or less as a tribe, governed by the owner of the ranch, conducting their own worship at its chapel. A few Indians own scattered, independent farms. Sivacá (*sivak ha'*, "Gunpowder Water"), near Ocosingo on the trail to Tenango, is a true village, self-governing, with its own *alcalde*, under the supervision of a Ladino *maestro*. All these groups come together at

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango
Aguacatenango

131 American Highway which connects San Cristobal de las Casas with
361 Comitan. They are 50 and 44 kilometers, respectively, from San
[491] Cristobal. Aguacatenango is closer to the branch road that continues south from the Highway to Venustiano Carranza, in the lowlands.

361 Both villages are 2,000 meters above sea level, placed in
133 a slightly raised terrain in the valley floor.

137 The vegetation climaxes surrounding the settlements are the same: woodlands of pine and oak, the second predominating, grasslands which for the most part are secondary growths in abandoned agricultural plots, and thorny bushes which the inhabitants of the valleys utilize for building fences.

241 The range of cultivated plants is the same in the two vil-
137 lages, including several varieties of corn and beans, squash and a few greens, while other edible plants grow wild in the edges of streams and rocky places unsuited for cultivation (Kaplan in McQuown et al., 1959, Part II, Section 6).

134 The soils are mainly limestone base, calcareous clay loam
132 and loam transported, both territories receiving the same amount
133 of rain. Surface water is drained internally within the basin of
136 the Rio Blanco, and in the edges of the village of Aguacatenango, forms, during the rainy season, a small lagoon, where a variety of small fish thrive (Wagner, in McQuown et al., 1959, Part II, Section 5).

136 The fauna include small deer, ocelots, snakes (poisonous and non-poisonous), domestic and field rats, and other small animals.